

## THE MERMAID.

It was years and years ago, and in Germany, where, especially at that day, a mighty line was drawn between the rich and the poor, that in a certain village beside the Rhine lived two who made the old story new for themselves, and almost believed, as lovers will, that they were the first who had ever loved each other—Gretchen and Carl, both peasant children, and both as poor, in everything but youth and health and beauty, as any twain could be.

But for all this, they would willingly have united their fortunes, or their lack of fortunes, but for the wise old folk, who know so much more about the world than young ones can.

The old folk set themselves to oppose the match stoutly on the ground that Carl would never earn the salt to his porridge, and that Gretchen, being very pretty, might make a better match. Indeed the baron, whose castle stood not far off, and who was not so old as he might have been, and was certainly rolling in gold, would, as all knew, have been only too happy to stoop as low as the peasant's cottage, and lead from thence the pretty Gretchen as his bride. But the girl found no charm in his title or in his wealth or his person to lead her to forget Carl; and when he left her to seek his fortune that he might share it, when found, with her, she gave him a lock of her golden hair, and promised that she never would forget him, and plighted her troth to him there beside the blue Rhine, forever and ever and aye.

Gretchen sang and danced no more. She changed sadly in face and heart; but the Baron Clausen only thought her more lovely and more like a lady with her pale cheeks and downcast eyes, and haunted the cottage as much as ever, under the pretence of patronizing the old grandfather.

As for Carl, where was he? Ever so far away by this time, footsore and sad, but making sure of a fortune ahead of him, and happy, just as even his stout legs began to fail him, in meeting with a good-natured boatman, who took him on board and bade him be at ease until he reached the end of his journey. So Carl lounged upon the deck of the little craft with its load of cheese, and looking over into the water thought of Gretchen, never guessing that his sighs had brought to the surface a beautiful mermaid, who no sooner set eyes upon Carl than she fell madly in love with him, and began forthwith to sing and play upon her lyre, and comb her sea-green hair, and use all her mermaid art to lure the beautiful peasant to her home in the caves of the ocean. She floated with him to the mouth of the Hagne, where, finding no avenue to fortune in any other direction, poor Carl shipped on board a vessel bound for a two-years voyage, and tired a man who was about to travel down into Hesse Darmstadt to take the news to his sweetheart.

"And tell her," said Carl, "that I shall think of her by day and by night, and shall return to claim her for my own when this voyage is over. And if her love is as strong as mine, she will wait for me."

The man promised, and the mermaid rejoiced, for Carl was to be within her reach for two long years in her own realm, the briny ocean. But this was not enough for her, for she was a very wily mermaid. One moonlight night she saw the messenger walking on the shore, and called to him.

He was an ugly looking fellow, in a rough fur cap, and with a red nose with carbuncles upon it, with whom mermaids were not apt to fall in love; so he had never seen one. And when he saw her with her pearly skin and sapphire eyes and floating hair, her hands lying upon the golden strings of her lyre, all ringed with pearls, and pearls dripping from the lobes of her pure ears and wound about her neck, and saw her smile, and felt her breathe, and heard her voice, he grew bewildered. First she made love to him; then she bade him do something to prove that he cared for her. It was such a little thing; only to go on board the vessel and take Carl unawares and push him over. After that he would find her waiting for him by the mouth of the Rhine, ready to bear him to her coral caves.

She had not the slightest intention of keeping her vow, but the man with the fur cap and the carbuncles on his nose believed her, and actually went on board the vessel and gave a form leaning over the bulwarks a push that sent it down into the water, but in his excitement he made a mistake, and only drowned a young sailor from Hanover, instead of tossing Carl into the mermaid's arms. Then terrified by the cry the man gave, he fled, not waiting to keep his appointment with the mermaid, but making the best of his way to Hesse Darmstadt, where he had business.

Then, being a good Catholic he be-thought him—for he had no idea of his mistake—that the drowned Carl would have no masses said for him unless his kindred knew of his demise, and so went down to the cottage where Gretchen sat spinning and sighing and thinking of poor Carl. There, with his fur cap hiding his bad eyes, he inquired if any there knew one Carl Steyer. There was a little cry, and the wheel stopped.

"Bring news of him," said the man, hiding his eyes yet more; "bad news. I knew him in Holland. He had shipped for a two-years voyage, but before the vessel started he was drowned. I saw him fall overboard. God rest his soul and comfort all here." Then he went away, inwardly cursing himself and the mermaid, who, in very excellent spirits, was following over the sea the vessel on which Carl sailed, thinking of nothing but home and Gretchen.

The news nearly killed the poor girl, since she never doubted it for a moment; but, though she had known Carl to be living, she would have thought of him only and waited for him through long rolling years, and loved him though all his beauty had left him, and though he had returned poorer than when he had departed from her; the veil of death separated him from her so completely that in the end she did not feel so angry with the Baron Clausen for bringing her fruits and flowers, or for looking at her tenderly and holding her hand fondly; and at last—for we must tell the truth, however to her disadvantage—she married the baron and went up to his castle his bride, and not unhappy; though but for the urging of the old folks, she never would have seemed to forget poor Carl so soon.

It was a grand wedding, and the bride was beautiful, and the baron was very kind to her; and instead of toiling in the fields Gretchen sat in her handsome house, to be waited on by her maidens, and wore silk instead of coarse stuff, and golden rings upon her fingers whence she had slipped poor Carl's gift, the little silver circlet, which was all that he could afford

to give her in token of her troth-plight. And in a year a little baby lay within her arms, and looked into her eyes, and taught her to love its father, who had been so tender and so kind to her, and she was the Baroness Clausen and a wife and a mother, and not the peasant girl Gretchen grieving for her lover any more.

And just at this time Carl Steyer, with his two-years' pay in his pocket and some hard-won possessions besides, stepped from the ship's deck upon dry land and hurried as best he might toward Hesse Darmstadt to find Gretchen. That she might be dead was a fear that crossed his mind, but that she might be married never occurred to him. He had sent her information of his intentions; he had toiled, drenched by rain, beaten by wind, pelted by hail, in danger of shipwreck and assailed by the fever-laden breezes of southern lands to find the little pittance which seemed so great a sum to him. He boasted it and footed it homeward in an ecstasy of yearning love, and the poor mermaid who had followed the vessel over the ocean, waited for it at foreign ports and followed it back again, made her way along the Rhine, sobbing and sighing, for her sailor had left the sea and was going back to his lady love, and she was about to lose him.

The baron's castle hung over the Rhine, and the nursery wherein the baroness watched over her baby boy looked out upon the water. It was under this window that the mermaid stopped, bemoaning herself, her flossy hair all tangled, her eyelids heavy, her lute unstrung and her looking-glass lost. And Carl hurried down to the cottage where Gretchen's grandmother dwelt, and rushed in and cried, for he was so brown and so long-bearded that they did not know him:

"I am Carl Steyer, come back to marry my dear Gretchen Werner! Tell me where to find her!"

But the old grandam answered: "You can't be Carl, for he is drowned and has had masses said for him; but even if you were you have no business to call the Baroness Von Clausen your Gretchen. It is a piece of impertinence not to be pardoned, should the baron hear you."

"The baroness!" faltered Carl. "How is the baroness?"

"Ay," said the old grandam. "She married the Baron Von Clausen generations ago, and has as fine a young baron as any one ever set eyes on. Would you have had her wait for a ship-boy to come back and make her a beggar? even if you were not a ghost, which I doubt greatly."

"Where is she?" gasped Carl. "I'll believe no one but her."

"She is where she ought to be—at the castle," said the old woman. "But you'd be mad to go there."

Perhaps Carl was mad, for he went. He put aside porter and maid and page, and made his way to the room where Gretchen sat singing to her babe; and she, seeing him forgot everything else, and rushed to meet him, and he took her in his arms and they wept together. But soon he put her off, and asked her sternly how it was that she had deceived him.

"I came back to win my bride," he said. "Oh, Gretchen, could you not keep faith with me for two little years?"

"I thought you dead," she said, then suddenly a great horror came upon her. "Why did you come?" she cried. "I am a wife. I have learned to love my husband, my child's father. Now there will only you again. Oh! cruel to come—cruel!" and amid these words, though even while she spoke them, she clung to Carl's shoulder.

They heard a clatter of horses' hoofs, and a voice below bidding the servants say if it were true that Carl Steyer really were closeted with their mistress—the baron's voice, and raised in angry tones.

"See!" cried Gretchen. "See! how cruel you are! He's jealous; he will hate me! I must not love you, for I am a wife. I cannot love him, for he keeps me from you. Even my babe will scorn me when they tell him my story. Oh, cruel to come back and ask me, and bring me such shame and sorrow!"

"Cruel!" cried Carl. "Ah, she calls me cruel; but see, Gretchen, I am kinder than you have been to me. The baron shall not find me here. Tell him Carl Steyer's ghost came to you. You will speak the truth, for I shall be dead when you utter the words. Adieu! Forget me, since that will make you happy. Adieu!"

And as he spoke he pushed the lattice open, and jumped from the window into the foaming waters of the Rhine. The jealous baron rushed in the moment after with his sword drawn, but found his wife alone beside her baby's cradle—alone, muttering and moaning of the sea and of Carl Steyer, as she muttered and moaned through all her weary life—a mad woman, from that hour, despite all that could be done by cunning leeches, bribed heavily to do their best with the baron's gold.

But as for Carl Steyer he did not drown. The mermaid caught him in her arms as he sank beneath the waters and bore him away to her caves of coral and pearl, where, with her songs and her embraces, she taught him to forget inconstant Gretchen, the toils of the sea, the pleasures of the land, his own soul, and everything but her.

So now, though the castle of the Baron von Clausen is a ruin, and all the barons of that name dead long ago, the peasants often see a fair, weeping phantom at its empty windows, and see, in the stream below, another fair as a maiden of the sea can be, who bears in her white arms the most beautiful of mankind, lulled into a mystic sleep by the magic of her song. And they say that it is the mermaid that followed Carl Steyer across the ocean, and now comes to taunt and triumph over the sad phantom of Gretchen Baroness von Clausen.—New York Daily News.

**To Find a Sweetheart.**  
The following directions are given to find a sweetheart: Visit a cemetery after nightfall, spit on twelve graves and repeat the Lord's prayer backward. Unravel a woolen stocking and bury the yarn in the back yard, with a paper on which your desire has been inscribed. Kill a black cat, and drink a portion of its warm life-blood and repeat some feticheistic jargon.—Exchange.

**So Genial and Kindly.**  
"Does your husband write his own stories or does he keep an amanuensis?" "He does all his writing himself." "I should think, he would find it so much easier to have an amanuensis, and he is well able to afford one." "That's true, but he is so genial and kindly a disposition that he could never dictate to anyone."

**Trip of a Meteor.**  
A remarkably brilliant meteor was lately seen in England, and two hours and a half later a similar phenomenon was witnessed in India, over 5,000 miles away. It is suspected that the two observations were of the same meteor, about the usual speed of meteors being indicated.—Boston Budget.

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Vice-President, F. P. Hastings.  
Secretary, Joseph O. Carter.  
Treasurer, Wm. G. Irwin.  
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